

EDITORIAL

Most UFO authors are notorious for their sensationalism and intellectual dishonesty. Others are apparently sincere but sometimes unintentionally funny. An example of the latter is a new book for budding UFO investigators which contains an impressive collection of clichés. It also contains gems of hard-to-get information, such as the following for ufologists who want to pester their MPs: 'Most people in London should be able to direct you to the House of Commons, and all "black cab" taxi drivers will know where to drop you. The nearest Underground station is Westminster . . . ' I'll write a review of it when I can stop laughing.

THE WALTON CASE - A MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTION

I have raised the Walton case repeatedly as an excellent example of one where none of the suggested explanations makes much sense, but have received little response apart from the usual stuff about motives for perpetrating a hoax. Remarkably few ufologists seem to be the slightest bit interested in considering the practical problems involved in organising and executing such a hoax. So let's try again. Incidentally, I wish to make it clear that I have not come to any definite conclusions about this case and that what follows is merely a discussion of some of the possibilities. My aim is to seek the truth behind this incident, and not to denigrate the persons who were involved, or who have investigated the case. As I see it, the true explanation must be one of the following:

1. The story told by Walton is true in all essential details. Walton was really abducted by aliens.
2. The woodcutters encountered some very rare manifestation of atmospheric electricity. Walton got too near it and was knocked out by an electrical discharge. When he recovered he wandered off in a dazed state and somehow managed to survive for five days, returning to full consciousness on a roadside at Heber. The fantasy about being taken aboard a saucer was an after-effect of the shock.
3. The incident was a hoax devised by Walton and Rogers. They rehearsed what they were going to do and say and rigged up something in the forest that would fool the other men into thinking they had seen a saucer. At least two of the men became suspicious later but they couldn't work out how the effect had been achieved so did not denounce it as a hoax.
4. It was a hoax and the other five men, as well as Walton and Rogers, were parties to it. It is also likely that Walton's mother and his brother Duane were in on it.
5. None of the above. Some other explanation should be sought.

Most people, including many who believe in the ETH, don't accept No.1 as a likely explanation.

A few people take explanation No.2 seriously, but to many ufologists it seems too much like a desperate attempt to avoid accepting No.1 or making sense of the hoax explanations.

Most people have concentrated on the possibility of a hoax but few have made any serious attempts to tackle the awkward questions which are raised. To start with, there is no general agreement, among those who insist that it must be a hoax, as to who was hoaxing whom. So do we go for some version of No. 3 or No. 4?

If we go for No. 3 then Walton and Rogers arranged for accomplices to rig up something in the forest to fool the other men into thinking that they had seen a UFO. Presumably, if this is what happened, these other persons would have removed the device after Rogers drove off pretending to be in a state of shock, and would have provided transport for Walton to take him to his prearranged hiding place.

According to Bill Barry, Town Marshal Flake said he thought that that the hoax was perpetrated by Travis Walton and his brother Duane. If this is true then perhaps Rogers might not have been in on it. This neatly removes the problem of the brilliant acting displayed by the men when interviewed by the Sheriff and Deputy Sheriff. The men were all telling what they believed to be the truth. On the other hand, if Rogers was a party to the hoax (with or without Duane being involved) then he had to act the part, but the other men's emotions were perfectly genuine.

There are no serious problems concerning the acts put on by Walton and Rogers since, as Karl Pflock demonstrated in a letter published in a previous issue (No. 8), there are many precedents, usually involving people falsely pretending to be victims of criminals. However, such incidents almost always involve only one person, or two persons who have worked up a convincing double act.

The main difficulty with No. 3 is of course the problem of how something could have been rigged up which was sufficiently convincing to fool the other five men. A possible answer is that the deception could have been achieved, not by the sophistication of the apparatus employed, but by the carefully rehearsed performances given by Walton and Rogers. It should be noted that the men didn't get much time to see what was happening. Immediately after the flash of light and Walton falling to the ground Rogers drove off. If this was a hoax it wouldn't do to give any of the other men time to get out and investigate, if they happened to be brave enough to do so.

You might object that attempting to fool people simply by rigging up a light in the trees and a bit of clever acting would be unlikely to succeed, but readers may recall my article on hoaxing (which appeared in issue No. 4). In this I noted how the success of the Warminster hoax of 1970 depended on the photographer removing the film with the faked pictures from his camera and asking if anyone could get it developed for him. This is the point where the hoax was very likely to fail, but someone accepted the film without asking any awkward questions and great embarrassment was caused to a number of UFO 'experts'.

There are problems with explanation No. 3 though, such as the strong possibility that some of the deer hunters who were in the forest could have witnessed the preparation and testing of the apparatus. Some investigators thus prefer explanation No. 4.

The big problem with No. 4 is that we don't know where to stop when including people in the conspiracy. Obviously we must include Walton, Rogers and the other five men, and some have included Walton's mother and his brother Duane. Also, if we accept this explanation then we don't even know if the men were actually in the forest on that day. Not only that, but if we read the accounts carefully we might even entertain doubts about the story of the great emotional scene in which the men were interviewed by Deputy Sheriff Chuck Ellison, who was later joined by Sheriff Gillespie and Undersheriff Coplan. It seems that the police files on this case conveniently disappeared, so we are left with a small but nagging doubt: Could some of the police officers have been in on it as well? And, while we are about it, why not Jim and Corel Lorenzen?

The point is, if we don't know who were or were not involved, and are not sure what really did or did not happen on that occasion, then it would be irrational to jump to any conclusions as to the true explanation. It is very easy to ascribe motives for hoaxing, but some of these motives would still be valid even if the event happened exactly as described. Any useful information or comments on this case would be most welcome, apart from discussion of motives and polygraph tests which have already been discussed exhaustively in the literature.

LITERARY CRITICISM

Reviews by Nigel Watson

Hilary Evans. *From Other Worlds*, Carlton, 1998

As might be expected from Hilary Evans, you get a wide ranging historical and paranormal perspective to: 'The truth behind aliens, abductions, UFOs and the paranormal'. The scope of the book is dazzling compared to more conventional chronicles of this subject; you get Martians, messages, entities, channelling, star people, MIB, ghosts, demons, ritual magic, mass hysteria, angels, along with reviews of major UFO cases and theories.

As it is a coffee table book it is full of stunning colour pictures which will no doubt attract buyers even if they are unfamiliar with Evans's work. For the uninitiated the mixture of topics might be too bewildering and hard to grasp, otherwise it serves as an excellent overview of Evans's approach to this subject. For anyone who thinks UFOs are just about spaceships and little green men this is a definite eye-opener.

Paul Cornell. *The Uninvited*, Virgin, 1997. £5.99

Steve Blake, an ex-photojournalist stumbles into a web of alien conspiracy that plans to change and take over the world. The book's origins as a 4-part TV series are belied by its lack of characterisation and its emphasis on plot and action. In the opening chapters Blake is shown to have a conscience about the images of death he captured on film, and the impact of real and faked images is considered. But, such musings are quickly dispensed with in favour of running around after aliens.

As the action is set in Britain there is a desire for a traditional existence that survives only in country calendars and period dramas. In this nightmare story the higher echelons of the police, politics and military combined with the nuclear and computer software industries are infiltrated by the aliens who take over people's minds and bodies. Newfangled technologies become the tools of the aliens, and the very heart of the British Establishment is riddled with aliens. You can almost feel the underlying ache for rosy-cheeked policemen, beaming over a Nintendo free state. Even the women in Blake's life represent old and new values; there is the cardigan-wearing, librarian, Melissa Gates opposed by his ex-wife Joanna, a power hungry newspaper editor. Guess which one is taken over by the aliens, and which one fights them to almost inevitable death.

Like most fictional aliens, these invaders have two fatal flaws; they are part of a collective network so if one is hurt the rest are too, and they are attracted by our polluted atmosphere. The former attribute in previous days would have made them communist surrogates, but here you can read them as being cyphers for modern existence. Female liberation, computers and nuclear power have bugged up the old values and ways of life. The aliens are an exaggeration of the plights of modernity which has destroyed the British idyll.

Given the premise of this work there are plenty of clichés, and you can easily anticipate many twists in the plot. There are references to alien autopsies, brain implants, ufology and *Fortean Times* but they are not pursued to any great extent. Overall this is an undemanding read suited for coffee breaks or train journeys.

David Skal. *The Monster Show: A Cultural History*, Plexus Books, 1994. £12.99

The world of horror overlaps the world of ufology and Fort in many varied ways. Like many strange phenomena, horror films, novels and plays can reflect wider social crises. Usually these expressions of popular concern are distorted and crystallised versions of real fears. In the 1950s, for example, all manner of monsters were unleashed on cinema screens as a result of tinkering with atomic power. On a deeper and less literal level horror movies can express concerns about death, evil, science versus nature/God, the role of the family, etc.

Skal's view is that the horror genre reflects the darker side of American culture. He begins with the freak shows that toured the US. However tacky or gruesome, they always attracted curious spectators. Such shows attracted the attention of fashion photographer Diane Arbus who realised that the fashion and freak industries are both devoted to the power of surface image. The difference is that the former is meant to make you feel better about yourself and the world, the latter obviously shows the reverse and makes you at least relieved that you are 'normal'.

The horror is that freaks destabilise our view of the world and show what can happen to any of us. Skal notes that after World War I there were thousands of veterans who returned with horrifying wounds. Lon Chaney capitalised upon this fascination through his portrayal of the hunchback of Notre Dame, and many other roles which involved some form of disablement or disfigurement.

Dracula and Frankenstein's monster came to prominence in the US through stage productions that originated in Britain during the 1920s. *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* and *Nosferatu* had important influences on the filmed depiction of horror movies, in terms of setting, storyline and make-up. *Caligari* upset many in the US because it was regarded as supporting the German film industry, so there was obviously a need for indigenous horror films.

Tod Browning's US production of *Dracula* made the horror movie a popular US box-office success that reflected the wild release of unthinking fun, prosperity and sexuality in the Jazz Age. The penalties for these excesses were paid by the 1929 Wall Street Crash. In its gloomy wake, 1931 became the year for productions of *Frankenstein* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The Frankenstein monster can easily be seen as a metaphor for the 1929 Wall Street Crash, and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* can be seen as the constant fight between good and evil, id and super ego. As Skal puts it the venues of castle, crypt and laboratory were now established as the settings for the horror film.

Skal's historical and social story of the horror genre steps from one important character to another. In this manner he gives us some very enlightening anecdotes about them and how they changed or mutated the genre. This isn't an academic or stuffy book, but his views on different films and their context does make for entertaining and enlightening reading.

The anecdotes and career details of horror movie producers are well chosen and very quotable. For example, I was intrigued by Skal's revelation that Adolf Hitler was a keen movie fan whose favourite films were *King Kong* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Apparently, Hitler

enjoyed whistling 'Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?' Such innocent detail just makes his real crimes all that much more horrifying, and certainly in a league beyond anything imagined by most horror films. Interestingly, a sub-genre of Wolf Man and werewolf movies flourished during World War II. It is suggested that these movie wolf creatures unconsciously reflected the war itself, in that the Wolf Man seeks to control his irrational, violent outbursts in an attempt to obtain a longed-for but always elusive peace.

The final chapters deal with the censorship issues that surrounded the horror comics of the 1950s, and there is an examination of the literature of Stephen King, Bret Easton Ellis and Anne Rice. Body mutilation, fears surrounding reproduction, the Cold War, Vietnam, and AIDS are also fully discussed in relation to the predominant motifs of horror fiction.

Skal's book is especially useful for its discussion of how the main horror motifs came to the screen, and he gives a good account of horror entertainment in the USA since World War II. To horror buffs I doubt that he provides much new data, but this is an excellent overview of the subject that relates to the wider social context beyond the screen, stage or page. For an accessible and readable entry into the world of horror this is the book to get.

LETTERS

Regarding your so-called 'Editorial' reprinted in the *Saucer Smear* (No. 18, August 1999). You seriously doubt that no crashes of space ships have taken place, ever, never, nohow, no way, absolutely, and you assure us with the statement: 'No alien spacecraft have crashed, you have my personal guarantee of that.'

Golly, John! I'm glad someone as lofty as yourself has finally 'guaranteed' that no aliens have crashed! I can sleep nights, now, knowing that John Harney, personally guaranteed it!

Let me ask, however, if John Harney has ever flown a jet fighter over Mount Rainier, in Washington State, in 1945-1999? If not, John Harney, your research is sorely lacking.

Have you ever, John Harney, laid on the sand near Area 51 in our desert? I mean, late at night on a summer's eve, when the skies are alive with craft of all description; and when Art Bell is talking about them to 100 million folks, on the air?

And, John Harney, where you on-site in 1947 in Roswell and environs to witness the paranoid US Military panic as they attempted to cover up the corpses of the little green men from their alien craft?

I'm not saying you, John Harney, are not qualified to judge if, indeed alien craft have crashed on earth; I'm simply saying, John Harney, that you have oatmeal for brains and diarrhoea of the word processor.

Why don't you go soak your heads - both of them? We dare you to let this letter see the light of day in your scandal-sheet.

The Honorable Senator Guy Aaron Arnott, Friends of Blennerhassett, Seattle, Washington

You refer to cases where 'none of the explanations offered seem to make sense', in which category Rendlesham might be placed. A group of US airmen thought they saw UFOs, but sceptics have argued that they had merely been looking at a lighthouse and a couple of stars. To the objection that it is unlikely that not one but several trained observers would all be misled in this way, it is replied that the Air Force were highly embarrassed that their men could have been so easily fooled, and so propagated the belief that ETs really were flying about. Alternatively, it is argued, the whole story was invented as a cover-up of a nuclear accident or something.

What this shows is that, on occasion, UFO sceptics will resort to the same kind of paranoia as believers, i.e. that the US Air Force is secretly aware of the truth that there are no such things as UFOs, but pretends otherwise for obscure but no doubt sinister motives of its own.

Gareth J. Medway, London

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